

Response of Allen Dyer, candidate for Howard County Board of Education, to Baltimore Examiner questions.

Dear candidates:

The Examiner is running a series of Howard County school board stories focusing on school-related issues now that three board member seats are open.

Below are the issues, and we would appreciate your comments as a way of informing our readers of your positions.

Please supply a **30-word response**. If the response is longer, we reserve the right to edit it, so all candidates have a voice on the issues. Also, please **e-mail me your photo with your responses**.

The deadline for the responses is noon Dec. 21 with the first story running Dec. 27.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call me at 410-878-6153 or e-mail me at jkowalkowski@baltimoreexaminer.com <<mailto:jkowalkowski@baltimoreexaminer.com>>.

Thank you for your time and good luck!

Sincerely,
Josh Kowalkowski
Education reporter with The Examiner

1). According to the National School Boards Association, school board members are charged with overseeing budgets that total millions of dollars, and must contend with issues such as student achievement, special education, technology, and hiring and retaining quality teachers.

What expertise do you bring to the school board to best accomplish these duties?

As a lawyer, I know the MARYLAND EDUCATION ARTICLE. I served as Treasurer of TUG, an international organization, and I created an asset management system for Shriners of North America.

2). Closing the achievement gap between minority students and other student groups has long confronted the school board.

Black and Hispanic students are not passing the High School Assessment at the same rate as white students. Beginning with this year's juniors, all students must pass the test to graduate from high school. For example, according to the 2007 results, 93.4 percent of white students passed algebra, but only 70.2 percent of black students and 76.4 percent of Hispanic students passed algebra.

How would you bridge the achievement gap?

I advocate using financial incentives to move the best qualified teachers to those schools having higher numbers of lower achieving students. Highly qualified teachers are our most important resource.

3) The PTA Council of Howard County and the Citizens Advisory Council are also active in the community. The PTA strives to promote parental involvement to better each child's education, while the CAC works to advise the board and facilitate its activities and programs in the public schools.

How can school board members best work with the PTA and CAC?

The board must operate transparently and open two-way channels of communication. I support a board email list for communication and a Wiki for collaboration with the PTA and CAS.

4). High housing costs in Howard County are resulting in many teachers living outside the county or leaving for jobs closer to their houses in other counties. The mean home value in Howard is \$470,000; the mean teacher salary as of July was \$64,095. What incentives would you provide to keep teachers in the county?

I support competitive salaries for all of our public education professionals but each board employee has a right to live where they so choose. Different perspectives enrich our schools.

5). Comprehensive elementary and high school redistricting appears to be needed in 2010, according to the school system's planning office. Redistricting is needed to manage available capacity in the western part of the county and for continued growth in the Centennial and Elkridge areas. Some parents are upset about a feasibility study that mentioned sending about 85 students in the Elkridge/Hanover area from Howard High School to Long Reach High School.

How can schools best balance fairness to families and practicality for the school system?

Our students should advance from elementary through high school with their peer group. A feeder system is the only practical solution. Fragmented, small feeds of students are unacceptable.

6). The Howard County school system's older schools are in need of renovations. The school board's 2007-08 fiscal year capital budget includes money for many schools, including \$27 million for Mount Hebron High School. Others targeted for renovations include Atholton High School and Northfield Elementary School. Which schools are most in need of renovations?

In a time of limited funds, those schools with higher numbers of lower achieving students should receive priority for renovations. Student needs should drive the board's decision making.

7.) Since the beginning of the school year, 11 Howard County students had confirmed cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. The school system stopped reporting cases to the county health department in November, after being advised that reporting these cases wasn't necessary unless they suggested an outbreak. Did the school system properly respond to the situation?

MRSA, "the cockroach of bacteria," is a warning that more germs are increasingly drug resistant. HCPSS should report every case and educate students about the importance of frequent hand washing.

**Thank you for the opportunity to express my views.
Allen Dyer, Board Candidate, December 24, 2007.**